



ALERT

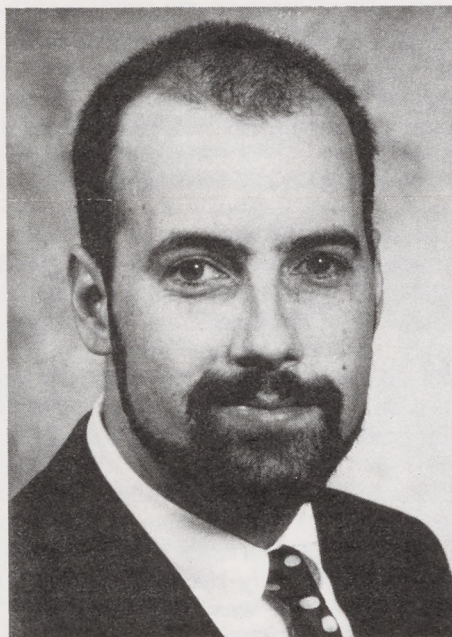
News from the UFMCC
on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment.
September 1992

AIDS Ministry at First MCC Wichita

Wichita, Kansas is a small city of 300,000 in a rural, conservative area of the United States. It is not easy to live with HIV/AIDS or to foster an AIDS ministry in this environment. For example, a conservative preacher from Topeka has spent a lot of time in Wichita, picketing the funerals of people who have died from AIDS-related complications. State Senator Eric Yost has fought to cut funding for HIV research. He calls AIDS "a self-inflicted disease," and claims there is "ample evidence that they are trying to infect the straight community."

There is at least one student with AIDS in each of Wichita's high schools, and yet teen-agers are still in denial about their own risk because the students with AIDS cannot "come out." In Kansas, there is no state protection for jobs or housing for people with HIV/AIDS.

There are few physicians in western Kansas who will treat people with HIV, and so they flood Wichita (in southeastern Kansas) for their services. There are a large number of hemophiliacs with HIV in western Kansas, but they can't get their medications in the small towns they come from, and even if they could, they'd be scared of being labeled gay. So they come to Wichita.



Cody Patton, AIDS Ministry Coord.

In the midst of this conservative atmosphere, First MCC of Wichita has over 200 active members, and according to Cody Patton, the church's AIDS Ministry Coordinator since December, 1991, First MCC is one of the only organizations in the gay community doing anything about AIDS. Rev. T.

Edward Helms, the pastor of First MCC until June, 1992, says that because of Cody, who is a well-respected activist throughout the state, First MCC has become a major player in AIDS services, and the church has a voice in influencing state level organizations and politics.

When Rev. Helms arrived in Wichita in January, 1988, the original AIDS task force had folded because of funding problems. The task force had set up an AIDS service organization, Connect Care, run by the Board of Hospice, but according to Rev. Helms, "there is a long history of fragmented service providers, and organizations were not effective in communicating with each other." With the MCC pastor's leadership, a new group came together and created an educational project called "AIDS Referral Services" (ARS) to fill the needs for helping people with HIV/AIDS with emergency funds and medications, support groups, and clear education. This organization was a subsidiary of MCC, operating under MCC's tax exempt status. In 1990, ARS won the Educator Award for the State of Kansas. When ARS went independent, Rev. Helms decided it was necessary for the church to have someone in full-time AIDS ministry, and so he hired Cody Patton.

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The Danish Approach To HIV/AIDS Education

"PAN-Bladet," the Danish national gay and lesbian magazine, recently got hold of a copy of ALERT, and wrote to us to receive a subscription. Along with their request came a copy of their latest issue, with a supplement in English, "The PAN Magazine Summer Guide 1992." From this supplement, we have gathered some knowledge of how the gay and lesbian community is confronting HIV/AIDS in Denmark.

Denmark is known around the world for its progressive attitude towards gays and lesbians. In 1987, the Danish penal code on "discrimination and insult" was expanded to include prohibition of discrimination and insult on the basis of sexual orientation. In 1989, the Danish Parliament passed the Act on Registered Partnership for two persons of the same

sex. MCC Copenhagen's pastor, Rev. Mia Andersen, and her spouse, Ms. Laurence Vergez, were among the first same-sex couples to be legally joined under the new law. There are now 663 registered partnerships in Denmark.

The keystones of Danish AIDS policy are "Information, Autonomy, and Anonymity." According to PAN Magazine, "Autonomy means that every Dane has a right to decide for himself [sic] whether he [sic] wants to be tested, treated, or advised." If a person chooses to be tested, the principle of anonymity means that person doesn't have to offer any sort of personal information. This is very attractive to foreign visitors to Denmark. One Danish physician is quoted in the

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Is The Miracle Over?

By Rev. Steve Pieters

On July 27, 1992, I began taking AZT. My physician, Alexandra Levine, M.D., says that's not bad for someone who originally got sick with HIV 10 years ago. I was diagnosed with ARC in 1982, and AIDS/Kaposi's Sarcoma and Lymphoma in 1984. At that time, there were no treatments available. They hadn't even developed the test for the antibodies to HIV, but in 1985, I went on the drug suramin, the first anti-retroviral drug ever tried against aids. It inactivated the virus, my immune system kicked back in, and the Kaposi's Sarcoma and Lymphoma both went into complete remission. Unfortunately, suramin was extremely toxic, killed a number of people, and didn't work for anyone else, and it was discontinued in use against HIV.

My physician then told me about a new drug they were beginning to study, and offered me the chance to go on it. This new drug was AZT. They really didn't know much about it at the time (this was early 1986), but I had had enough of experimental drugs after suramin, and my cancers were still in remission, so I turned it down.

I have been clinically well in all respects since recovering from suramin back in 1986. There has been no need for AZT. I believe this is truly a miracle, which I attribute to the grace of God and the healing power of faith in Jesus Christ. But recently, my blood work has begun to show signs that something is happening to my immune system again.

Now I have been diagnosed with ITP, a condition where HIV destroys the platelets. In the last month, my helper cells have dropped from over 600 to around 300. My doctor told me it was time to go on AZT, which has been shown to be an effective treatment for ITP.

AIDS Ministry at First MCC Wichita (continued from page 1)

Cody has established "Care Coordination Teams," with two already functioning, and three more teams in training. Each team, comprised of 7 or 8 people, works with one client, providing help ranging from phone support to laundry, cleaning, transportation, meals, and spiritual, emotional, and social support. Mr. Patton believes this is much more effective than a one-on-one "buddy" program, because with a whole group working with one client, a volunteer is less likely to burn out. The

This felt like being diagnosed all over again. The night before starting the AZT, I was more scared than when we started suramin. We have a lot more data on AZT than we did on suramin. There's also a lot more doubt and outright hostility towards the drug, precisely because we know so much more about it. By going on AZT, was I going to ruin what health I have? If they weren't doing blood tests on me every month, they'd never have known anything was wrong. On the surface, I am still asymptomatic.

Contemplating going on AZT filled me with terror. I had images of ingesting what some people with HIV/AIDS call poison, and instantly (or slowly, depending on the scenario of my nightmare) getting horribly sick. I imagined the worst case scenario: that AZT would make me sick and weaken me considerably, the lymphoma would return, Kaposi's Sarcoma lesions would spring out all over and inside me, and I would die before the next General Conference.

I worried considerably that "the miracle is over." What would this do to my ministry? Would anyone ever want to hear me preach again? Would people laugh behind my back, saying, "You see, I knew he wasn't really healed." Would people be angry at me for "blowing" the miracle somehow? Would people say "His faith must have wavered."? Will I still have a ministry? So much of my identity has been wrapped up with being well, with recovering from full-blown AIDS.

Probably some people will say all these things. But I know my faith is strong. I can feel God's presence in my life as acutely as I have felt it all along. No one can take away the miracle that I defied the odds and recovered from full-blown AIDS back in the days when there were so few treatments available. Rev. Elder

Troy Perry reassures me that to him, I'll always be "our miracle boy."

When I took my first AZT capsule, I had a friend to my house, and we prayed over the pills, then I put on Judy Garland performing, "I Could Go On Singing" while I took my first pill. Then we watched an episode of "I Love Lucy." If I'm going to take AZT, I'm going to take it with the utmost faith and confidence I can, and use every tool I used back in '84 and '85 to prepare my body for healing!

I'm beginning to get a little less catastrophic perspective on the whole situation. One friend told me that if I survived suramin, which actually killed a number of people, then I can handle AZT, which is a lot less toxic. Another friend suggested that I look at this new diagnosis as a temporary setback, something like a herpes attack. I've certainly had those in the last six years. All I do is take acyclovir, and the episode is over before I know it. Now all I have to do is take AZT for a while, and, hopefully, this episode will be over. There's no reason to believe that this is the beginning of the downward spiral to death. There's every reason to believe that God is still greater than AIDS, and greater than ITP or AZT's side effects.

Now that I've actually started AZT, it's less terrifying than when I was contemplating the possibility. After ten days of taking it, I'm having the typical side effects associated with the first two weeks of taking AZT: I feel a vague nausea, body aches and headaches, and fatigue. I know something is happening in my body. The point is to remember that these side effects mean that the drug is working as it is supposed to, and my doctor assures me that these side effects will disappear after two weeks.

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teams also become a support group for each other, meeting on a monthly basis.

The training program is an essential part of the Care Coordination Teams. They use the training manual "Handle With Care," by Ronald Sunderland, which was suggested by Rev. Paul Tucker at Cathedral of Hope MCC in Dallas, TX. They supplement the text with local experts who come in and teach about everything from what to expect with different opportunistic infections, to making a bed with the pa-

tient still in it. A large number of the volunteers for the program are not from First MCC, and so the Care Coordination Teams become a real interfaith experience for the volunteers.

With over 200 members, First MCC has at least 25 members with HIV, and Cody says there are "undoubtedly more." According to a survey which Patton took when he began at First MCC, the HIV+ members are "not interested in Christian-based support groups

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First MCC Atlanta's Red Ribbon Campaign

The AIDS Ministry program of First MCC of Atlanta, GA, has embarked on a "red ribbon campaign." At the recent Human Rights Dinner, First MCC provided a box of red ribbons for everyone to wear, to promote AIDS awareness and the individual's commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS. Since then, First MCC has provided red ribbons for Atlanta's Lesbian/Gay Pride Week, the Hotlanta Raft Race and Weekend, and the showing of the Names Project Quilt. In the future, First MCC will be donating red ribbons "to any and all fundraising campaigns in our community." According to Tom Larson, who is in charge of the Red Ribbon campaign, "This shows the community that First MCC cares and is involved in the fight against AIDS."

All members and visitors to First MCC Atlanta are encouraged to show their support by wearing a red ribbon as well. Red ribbons are always available in a basket in Hose Hall, just outside the sanctuary. First MCC also shows their commitment to the fight against AIDS by providing a basket of free condoms at the door to the church.

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So while I am disappointed that my long period of wellness is over for now, I cannot afford to feel helpless or hopeless about this. I reaffirm my faith in God, who loves me, and I hope that my sisters and brothers in faith will support me in starting on the road to recovery from this latest HIV-related condition. Maybe this is just another opportunity for miracles! As God said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

The words of Paul in II Corinthians 4:7-10 again give me great encouragement: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels; to show that the higher power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies." ▼

Danish Approach to HIV/AIDS Education (continued from page 1)

magazine as saying, "You don't have to open your mouth to have an HIV test!"

With a long tradition of openness regarding sexuality, the Danes expect their HIV information to be open and honest. Indeed, the national gay and lesbian organization, LBL, sponsors regular meetings at the PAN disco, where two gay men lecture about safe sex techniques, and then demonstrate what they have just taught! These meetings, called "Come In," are offered in English four times during the summer, (in addition to the regular presentations in Danish) in order to educate foreign visitors who may not have as easily accessible information in their own country.

As part of their safe sex campaign, LBL sponsors a group called the Safe Sex Gang. This is a group of young lesbians and gay men who distribute

condoms and safe sex guidelines to other young people. Sometimes dressed in costumes, they frequently use a "bicycle wagon" called "The Rolling Condomerie," which can be seen on the streets of Copenhagen, as well as the beaches of Zealand. The Rolling Condomerie is a favorite photo opportunity for tourists. Although the condoms are not given away for free, they are considerably cheaper than in the stores, because no one is expecting to make a profit from the Rolling Condomerie. This way, people are encouraged to buy a wide variety of condoms to find out which brand is most comfortable.

LBL also sponsors a group called OASIS-project, which targets men who have sex with other men, and may not self-identify as gay. OASIS-project distributes free condoms in public parks

In addition to the red ribbon campaign, the AIDS Ministry of First MCC reaches out to people hospitalized with HIV/AIDS by paying for television rentals for indigent patients at Grady Hospital. A TV rental service charges \$3.78 a day per TV, and of course, many patients cannot afford this additional charge. One of the bars in Atlanta does regular fundraisers for the church's TV rental program so that the resources of the church are not drained. Now, because First MCC has significantly increased the volume of business for the TV rental company, they have reduced the charge for the church to only \$2 a day. This will enable First MCC to turn on even more TV's!

Members of First MCC Atlanta also prepare hot meals two or three times a month for the Atlanta Interfaith AIDS Network's Day Activities Program, Common Ground, which serves 20 or more people with HIV/AIDS every day. First MCC continues to reach out and let people living with HIV/AIDS know that God loves them, through their multi-level AIDS Ministry program. ▼

AIDS Ministry/Wichita (cont'd from page 2)

because they get what they need from the on-going life of the church."

Patton says, "I believe there is a time-lag here of 5-10 years, from what I read in newsletters from either coast, but in the last two years we've come a long way in Wichita. We're still fighting the stigma of being a 'gay disease.' We will see the HIV+ figures increase rapidly, because of the lack of education. We're afraid that it's really going to increase in the heterosexual community, particularly among teens, because they are in denial. They have a program called 'Teen Hope' where teens teach each other about HIV. But there's a whole group who just don't care. There is also a large number of gay men also in denial, and unsafe sex still goes on, probably because of low self-esteem."

"But even here, where attitudes are still five years behind, we have a large church, we can be open and deal with the community, and provide services. We don't give up, even though it is extremely frustrating." ▼

and toilets in Copenhagen. This group is more "discreet" about their activities, and sometimes places the free condoms in bird's nests. Two men from the project then wander the parks and try to talk to men about safe sex. PAN magazine claims, "The OASIS-project has been met with understanding from all the local authorities concerned."

Every type of condom available in Denmark has to be approved by Danish Health Authorities. And lubricants are color-coded: tubes with red print mean a water-based lubricant, and blue print means the lubricant contains nonoxonyl-9.

LBL has taken a controversial stance on multiple partners: claiming that having multiple partners has nothing to do with safe sex, the magazine states, "Cor-

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Agape MCC Ft. Worth Starts Spiritual AIDS Ministry

Agape MCC of Ft. Worth, TX, started "Spiritual AIDS Ministry" as an outreach to provide care teams in conjunction with Tarrant County AIDS Interfaith Network, as well as to provide spiritual counseling to people living with HIV/AIDS on a non-judgemental, non-denominational basis.

There currently exists a critical need for transportation for people living with AIDS in Ft. Worth/Tarrant County. This need has led the Spiritual AIDS Ministry to start the fundraising efforts necessary to acquire a van. A benefit show at The Corral in Ft. Worth was presented on Friday, August 28, 1992 to raise money for the van.

Mr. Tony Voss, events coordinator for the Spiritual AIDS Ministry, says, "This fundraiser at the Corral put us on the way to acquiring a van so that we can provide transportation for PWA's to their medical appointments." ▼

Skills Building Conference

A REMINDER: The Annual U.S. National Skills Building Conference will be held this year in Washington, DC on October 8-11 at the Sheraton Washington Hotel. The conference is sponsored each year by the AIDS National Interfaith Network (ANIN), the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA) and the National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC). The theme for this year's conference is "RESULTS".

The conference will be held in conjunction with the final display of the entire Names Project Quilt on the Mall in Washington from October 9-11. The last time the entire Quilt was seen by the public was in Washington in 1989. The conference schedule will be coordinated with the events surrounding the Quilt to allow participants to attend both events.

The conference will conclude with an Interfaith Memorial Service at the Washington National Cathedral. The Interfaith Service will be dedicated to those who have died from, and are living with, AIDS. The Rev. Larry Uhrig, pastor of MCC of Washington, DC, will speak as the witness in the "Personal Response to AIDS" section of the service. The MCC Washington DC choir will also be singing in the service.

AIDS Ministries attending the service are encouraged to participate in the processional carrying a banner representing their organization. The banners should be 3 ft x 6 ft (the same size as a panel of the Quilt) and carried on a vertical pole. The banners will be placed in stands around the Cathedral to serve as a backdrop for the thirty-plus healing stations needed in the service. Your organization provides the banner and the pole, the Cathedral will provide the stand.

Scholarships will be offered to individuals who would like to attend the conference but lack sufficient funds.

Rev. Steve Pieters, an ANIN Board Member, says "Because UFMCC AIDS Conferences have not received enough support to continue them, we are urging people from MCC to attend the National Skills Building Conference, not only for the vast amount of information and learning, but because this is an excellent opportunity to network with AIDS activists from around the country."

For more information on the conference, please write to: National Skills Building Conference, 300 I St., N.E., Suite 400, Washington, DC 20002; fax number (202) 544-0378, or call (202) 544-1076. ▼

Danish Approach to HIV/AIDS Education, (continued from page 3)

rect use of condoms makes transmission of hiv-virus impossible and with that in mind, it's safe to have sex with as many different sex partners as you want to." While many might question the assumption that "correct use of condoms makes transmission of hiv-virus impossible," (most studies indicate that condoms, even when correctly used, have approximately a 10% failure rate) LBL's stance reflects the openness and freedom which many people from outside Denmark have come to expect of the Danes.

Although conditions sound ideal for education and prevention of HIV transmission, there are still homophobic reactions within the country. PAN Magazine reports that one doctor in Jutland always took an HIV antibodies test of any patient he suspected might be homosexual, without the patient's permission or knowledge. One patient reported that the doctor had told him his test came back "slightly positive." The doctor was reported to the health authorities, who have reprimanded him. Hopefully, they also gave him some of the ample education available in Denmark.

According to a survey of 1600 Danish gay men, conducted by LBL, "gay men in Denmark are more concerned and careful about safe sex now than in 1988, when a similar survey was made." With the creative education campaigns run by LBL, and the open, progressive attitude of the government, Denmark seems to be well on the way to seeing their rate of HIV infection actually go down. ▼

AIDS Update Conference in San Francisco

The fifth U.S. National AIDS Update Conference will be held October 6-10, 1992, at the Civic Auditorium in San Francisco, CA. The theme, "HIV/AIDS: A Shared Responsibility," reflects efforts to integrate the concerns endemic to this disease. The goal of this Annual Conference is to provide opportunities for dialogue and discussion among health care service providers, policy makers, people with HIV and community leaders to find the best means for meeting the special challenges which the epidemic poses.

The Conference program includes four tracks: Policy and Administration, Education and Prevention, Care and Services, and Treatment. Speakers are scheduled to include U.S. Surgeon General Antonia Novello, Marcus Conant, members of the National Commission on AIDS, Mervyn Silverman, Phill Wilson, and Paul Volberding. There will be several events in conjunction with the conference: "AIDS in the Arts" (an art exhibition), a performing arts theatre, poster sessions, roundtable luncheons, and a film festival.

Fees are \$245 for conference participants, and \$100 for persons with HIV/AIDS. For registration forms and more information, write NAUC92 Conference Registrar, c/o KREBS Convention Management Services, 555 DeHaro St., Suite 200, San Francisco, CA 94107-2348; or phone the office at (415) 255-1297. ▼

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